



TO: Sen. Ted Kennedy and Rep. James Albis, Chairmen,
And the Members of the Committee on the Environment

Testimony from Rivers Alliance of Connecticut
Public Hearing, February 4, 2015, on

RB 347 AAC THE PERCENTAGE OF STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDS THAT MAY BE USED TO PURCHASE OPEN SPACE UNDER THE OPEN SPACE AND WATERSHED LAND ACQUISITION PROGRAM. Support.

RB 6033 AAC THE INCLUSION OF JUICES, TEAS AND SPORTS DRINKS UNDER CONNECTICUT'S BOTTLE BILL. Support.

RB 349 AAC SINGLE-USE CARRYOUT PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS AND THE USE OF REUSABLE BAGS. Support.

Rivers Alliance of Connecticut is a statewide non-profit organization, founded in 1992, as a coalition of river organizations, other conservation non-profits, individuals, and businesses working to protect and enhance Connecticut's rivers, streams, aquifers, lakes, and estuaries. We promote sound water policies and water stewardship through education and assistance at the local, regional, and state levels.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment in this hearing, and to voice support for these three bills.

RB 347 has been discussed at length in the state Natural Heritage, Open Space, and Watershed Lands Acquisitions Review Board, of which Rivers Alliance is a member. The lead proponents there are Connecticut Forest & Park Association and Connecticut Land Conservation Council. The deletion proposed in the bill addresses language that was introduced some years ago to semi-resolve a particular perceived problem in Highlands conservation. That language caps the maximum government funding that can be used as a match for certain land acquisition grants. Unfortunately, the cap requirement makes some very worthy land-acquisition projects too costly to pursue, especially for applicants of modest means, such as small land trusts. The proposed deletion will benefit communities seeking to conserve open, natural spaces. This is important to Rivers Alliance, because vegetated open space is the best guarantor of good water quality.

RB 6033 is the logical and anticipated extension of the state's bottle bill. Rivers Alliance urges passage of this act in order to further protect wetlands, rivers, and the shore of the Sound from bottle debris. Glass bottles are less toxic than plastic but more apt to give a nasty cut to anyone walking on the beach, launching a kayak, or fishing in a river. Unwashed bottles attract yellow jackets and worse. Plastic bottles, like so many plastic products, are dangerous to aquatic life

and human health. (See more below.)

RB 349 is an important step toward reducing the exploitation of resources needed to provide carryout bags made of paper or plastic. To focus just on water, paper and plastic products typically use large quantities, for example, it takes more water to manufacture a water bottle than the bottle can hold. Paper mills have been notorious river polluters. Their operations have dramatically improved in many locations in recent years, but they still need a lot water throughout the process. Using less paper will save water.

It makes no sense to use plant and water resources to create immediately disposable products, the carryout bags. These bags bulk up the waste stream and, worse, add to the debris in our waters, on land, in trees, just about everywhere. I have done a fair amount of supermarket shopping where there is a fee for bags, and people quickly become bag savers under these conditions. It is not a hardship. The European Union has just passed a law to restrict use of plastic grocery bags to reduce litter and the “plastic soup” in oceans (as reported by Reuters, 11/21/14).

A word on plastic. It is a ubiquitous and potent contaminant in oceans, estuaries, and fresh water. All sorts of plastic products eventually disintegrate in water into tiny bits that enter the food chain. To make matters worse, these plastic bits can soak up contaminants. Researchers at the University of Western Australia reported in 2013 that every square kilometer of Australian surface sea water is contaminated by 4,000 pieces of plastic. The great Pacific Garbage Patch, a plastic gyre, is twice the size of Texas with millions of tons of plastics. Similar gyres exist in all oceans. Sea life is being choked, strangled, and poisoned. The shores of Long Island Sound provide sad evidence of the ugly prevalence of plastic debris. The trash is discarded in the sea and in rivers that run to the sea. It is harmful every mile of the way.

Connecticut has taken some important small steps to control the most infamous component of numerous plastics, bisphenol A (BPA), a substance that mimics estrogen and can disrupt development of reproductive systems. Scientists are currently trying to assess the global health effects of BPA, particularly synergistic effects arising from widespread interaction with similar estrogen-like compounds in pesticides and cosmetic products. Sexual anomalies in fish, amphibians, and humans have been linked to variety of estrogen-mimicking substances. The dangers of BPA were addressed in an alarming article in Scientific American (2/16/2008). Studies before and especially since have painted an even scarier picture. And nothing makes the point better than the disturbing photos on YouTube. Just google.

Thanks for pushing us all to use less plastic. It is good for the earth and not hard to do.

Rivers Alliance would be happy to help in any way that would assist in passage of these bills.

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